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PHOTO BY TONY BARNARD

Above, Phast Phreddie, editor of the fanzine Back Door Man which he started with six other music buffs and savings from his hamburger-stand job.

hole. We all had jobs so we chipped in. It costs about $1,300 to put out an issue and the magazine brings in about $1,000 a month, so it's usually touch and go."

What gives Slash an edge on the competing fanzines is the consistently high quality of the writing. Despite—or possibly because of—Bessy's foreign citizenship, he has an uncannily insightful overview of American culture. He writes with bristling, slam-bang energy as he spews forth a monthly barrage of fire and brimstone laced with self-mocking wit.

In addition to its four founding editors, Slash has attracted some of L.A.'s best writers, photographers, and designers, who comprise a revolving staff of approximately 20 contributors. Most work under pennames, all labor without pay and everyone does his share of drudgery.

As with Back Door Man, the staff of Slash is more than a little surprised to find itself still at it a year later, with a potentially successful publication on its hands.

With a circulation of 10,000, Slash receives as much as 200 pieces of mail a month from as far away as Norway and Australia. More important, the record industry is no longer ignoring Slash and the once elusive ads are coming in with more regularity.

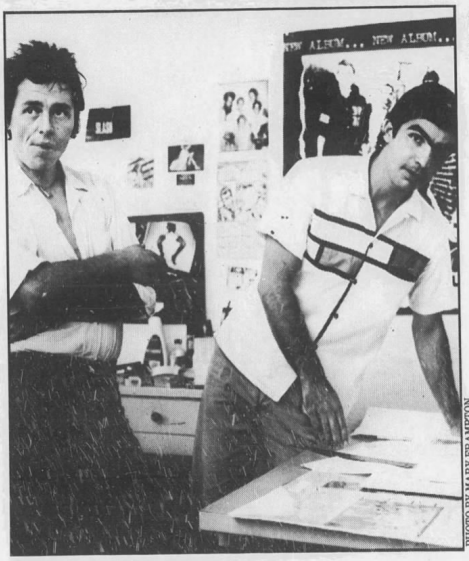

PHOTO BY MARY FRAMPTON

Below, French-born Claude Bessy, left, has emerged as a spokesman for the punk scene. He and Steve Samiof, right, are editors of Slash magazine.

"The possibility of success is scary," notes Samiof. "It opens up a whole new realm of decision making."

Is Los Angeles big enough to support two alternative music magazines? Although Slash and Back Door Man appear to be competing for the same readership, Bessy feels that the appeal of the two magazines is vastly different.

"Slash is not objective. We offer ideas and opinions rather than facts. We bluff a lot and come on strong and a lot of people don't like that about us. Back Door is for die-hard rock 'n' rollers and fills a different need. If it's only rock 'n' rollers, I'm not interested. I'm interested in the stuff that doesn't get a chance to be heard."

In this case, the stuff that's been given a half-hearted chance is, of course, punk rock. What becomes of Slash when and if new wave dies its long-prophesied death?

"If what they call 'punk' dies there will be something else," concludes Bessy. "Slash's existence doesn't depend on the success of punk rock. It may not be music, but there will always be an undercurrent of rebellion. Punk was other things in other times and it will always exist." □

McKenna regularly covers the rock scene for The Times.

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